

Donna Spivey has been selected as the 2016 Phoenix South First Things First Champion for Young Children.

The award is given to local champions who actively volunteer their time to raise public awareness of the importance of early childhood development and health. Champions spend a significant amount of time volunteering with FTF and building public awareness about the importance of early childhood issues.

Donna Spivey engaged in awareness-raising efforts such as:

- Participating in Early Childhood Every Day training.
- Inviting FTF to participate in regular parenting classes and to present during Kindergarten readiness events.
- Including FTF messaging during her presentations and classes.
- Including FTF information or messages in the weekly bilingual newsletter for parents attending her classes and the greater community.
- Sharing with FTF contact information of parents so they can start receiving FTF online newsletter.



We recently caught up with Spivey, who works as Pre-K Parent Liaison of the Community Learning Center at Creighton School District.

Question: Why do you feel early childhood development and health is so important?

Answer: I feel that early childhood development and health are so very important – beginning during pregnancy. Making an early investment of informed, abundant *and* loving support of your child, will show positive effects which will endure for the rest of his or her life – and even to future generations. Collectively, our community will be healthier and stronger as well.

Q: What caused you to get involved in efforts to increase public awareness in early childhood issues?

A: I first began to learn about the importance of early childhood issues through reading on the subject during my pregnancy. Firsthand, in my own family, I saw the positive effects in my own daughter. Since I began teaching families with young children in my current position, I have seen how early intervention with families makes an incredible difference with children.

Q: Why do you feel building awareness in early childhood and developmental health is so important for families and communities?

A: I believe that parents are capable of being the best teachers and caretakers for their own children. If we equip families with information about brain development, health and nutrition, and some tools in which they can implement in the home, they will give their very best to their children and the children in their care. Programs that work specifically with parents, in my experience, seem to have the most powerful impact on children.

Q: How have you seen awareness for the early years change in your community?

A: Without a doubt, there has been an increase in the awareness for the early years in our community – in the last three years in the Creighton School District. During this time, I have seen a rather significant presence of organizations holding similar missions as FTF, many of which I had come to learn that are grantees of FTF. It is apparent that there has been a shift in the attitude of parents from holding the basic roles of cooking and taking children to school, to now taking the role of ‘teacher’ with their children. With the role of teacher, often in the past being left to the preschool or headstart teacher. In our school district community and the city, I have observed a marked increase in the presence of organizations with the mission to teach and perhaps, inspire parents to take an active role in their young child’s development.

Q: How do you suggest other people in your community get involved?

A: Just the simple statement, *90% of a child’s brain develops before age 5*, can send any parent, grandparent, caregivers or member of the community at-large into action – with urgency. I have seen how those nine words can impact our families – in my class and elsewhere. It’s pretty simple, but at the sametime effective. Share that sentence with family members, neighbors, people in your parish or church, and others in the line at the grocery store!